

THE HORRIBLE SOUTH

BY GERALD W. JOHNSON

FAR back in the Dawn Age—*circa* 1924—the lamented Reviewer, of Richmond, published an article relating to the development of belles-lettres in the South which ended with this passage:

North Carolina a few years ago produced one immortal whose works are not included in "The Library of Southern Literature"; yet Miss Peterson—for such was her name—in her "Vision" produced two lines that I will set up against the best of that J. Gordon Cooglar so enthusiastically admired by Mr. Mencken. They read:

I seen Pa coming, stepping high,
Which was of his walk the way.

He who has the vision to see Southern literature coming at all—and I profess to have it—needs must see it stepping high, for that is of its walk the way. It could not be otherwise. It has the pulse of the tom-toms in its veins, the scents of the jungle in its nostrils, and the flaming colors of the jungle in its eyes. It will be colorful beyond belief; instead of a discreet *maquillage* it will come wearing smears of paint like a witch-doctor. It may be outlandish, but it will not be monotonous. It may be gorgeously barbaric, but it will not be monotonous. For all I know, it may be in some manifestations tremendously evil—it may wallow in filth, but it will not dabble in dirt.

Regarded merely as a specimen of English prose this, I must admit, has little to recommend it; but, regarded as prophecy, I submit that it is what our modern *précieuses* term a lallapaloosa. Mark you, this was written before many Americans were aware of the existence of such people as Laurence Stallings, Paul Green, Julia Peterkin, Frances

Newman, DuBose Heyward, Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, or even T. S. Stribling, for although Mr. Stribling had published several novels, "Teef-tallow" was still two years in the future. Mr. James Branch Cabell, Miss Ellen Glasgow, Miss Mary Johnston, and Mr. Irvin S. Cobb very nearly constituted the full list of living Southerners whose fiction was read beyond the Potomac. Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and George W. Cable were as dead as Edgar Allan Poe. Here and there a lonely scholar, such as Archibald Henderson or Ulrich B. Phillips, was breaking into print with a volume of history, criticism, or biography. Hervey Allen, living then in Charleston, had won a prize with "The Blindman" and had set Heyward and Josephine Pinckney to singing, while occasional pipings were heard from the direction of John Crowe Ransom, in Tennessee, William Alexander Percy, in Mississippi, and John McClure, in New Orleans. Granting that these were good people; granting that one or two of them even touched greatness, and that several others have become much more significant in the last decade, can any rational man maintain that their work in 1924 bore any obvious relation to the characteristic Southern literature of 1935? Yet if you admit that it did not, then you must admit that the prophet quoted above did a really remarkable bit of prophesying.

Whereat I modestly rise and take a bow. For I wrote that article in the Reviewer.

But having made an honest confession so far, I might as well strain honesty a little further and admit that when I wrote, I never dreamed of anything like "God's Little Acre" or even "The Hard-Boiled Virgin." Nobody has been more astonished than I have at the trend Southern writing has taken since Emily Clark fled to infidel parts and The Reviewer yielded up the ghost. Nobody expected less than I the development of a situation in which it is left to Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer, of Pennsylvania, to write of Southern swords

and roses, while the Cavaliers and their ladies apply themselves assiduously to loving delineations of hell and damnation, and little else.

Oh, yes, of course I have heard of Herbert Ravenel Sass and "Peter Ashley" and James Boyd and Roark Bradford and Stark Young. Nor do I yield to any in my admiration of the delicate, yet powerful, artistry of Ellen Glasgow. Indeed, for sheer excellence of craftsmanship I believe—and I say it with a sidelong glance at Mr. Cabell—that "The Romantic Comedians" takes rank above any other novel that has come out of the South in my lifetime. Of course, if you were to push me into a corner with "Jurgen" I might take refuge in the technicality that "Jurgen" is described by its author as a biography; but I am sure you are too polite to press the issue. All these people, however, are outside the main current of Southern writing. The point will be granted without question as regards Mr. Cabell, who never has been in any current; but I think it is equally true of the others. Above the Potomac and west of the Mississippi, at any rate, the impression is general that the characteristic Southerners are the horror-mongers.

This is bitter medicine for conservative Confederates and many of them refuse to swallow it. Dixie is full of spirited old women of both sexes who decline to recognize any merit in men and women who have scandalized them. Indeed, it is safe to say that if the Southerners who are now attracting most attention had been restricted to their sales in the South, they would never have survived. But that is true of Miss Glasgow and Mr. Cabell as it was true of Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris. "She never was much given to literature" remains among the truest words ever spoken of the South. If the condition needs correction, it is not for the benefit of the authors; as long as they can sell to the benighted Yankees, they will do very well. It is the South itself that loses when it fails to pay careful attention to these people.

For, difficult as it is for the old women to believe it, they

do not write that way merely because they are full of original sin. One man might, or two, but not a whole school. They set down what they see, or what they honestly think they see, around them; and if what they see is dreadful, it is for the South to look to it. The mere advertisement of our defects is not a fault—on the contrary, it is a virtue, for a man does not emit agonized yells unless he is hurt. There are men who have walked through some of the scenes described in “Sanctuary” without turning a hair, but William Faulkner screamed until he curdled the blood of half the country. Who is the more civilized, Faulkner or the men who were never horrified by a real lynching half as much as they were by his description of one? When is the South more civilized—when its young men view its horrors impassively, or when they are so revolted that they howl until the continent rings again?

Perhaps, though, our genuine conservative Confederate would describe his sorrow's crown of sorrow not as anything the men have done, but as what the ladies are doing to themselves. Without doubt, the Southern lady has suffered much at the hands of her sisters within the past decade. Ellen Glasgow began the work of demolition long ago; with a smile and a scalpel she has been operating relentlessly for many years. But just about ten years ago Frances Newman went to work with a yell and a poker. The walloping she gave “The Hard-Boiled Virgin” stands as one of the most magnificent tantrums in all literature. The South was properly shocked, and closed its eyes to the inconvenient fact that if the Southern lady under attack had been stuffed with anything but sawdust, Frances could never have knocked her to pieces so easily.

As a matter of fact there is, or there was, a Southern lady whom Newman's shafts never touched. This lady literally had everything—grace, dignity, intelligence shot through with humor, astounding endurance, a spice of malice, and a courage that might have put Bayard to shame. But she was

not a product of the ante-bellum South. She was the woman who was a young girl during, or shortly after, the Civil War; and far from being a hot-house flower, her existence was about as sheltered as that of Molly Pitcher, who served the gun at Monmouth. Southern women were not sheltered from 1865 to 1880. On the contrary, like the ladies of doubtful reputation in Scripture—but in a very different sense—their “feet took hold on hell.” The South, between 1865 and 1880, had no room for hot-house flowers. It was a storm-beaten land, a land of blood and fire. Even the most privileged of its women in those days were intimately acquainted with the three great verities, poverty and love and war; and any one of them who survived at all, survived because she was a harder-boiled virgin than anything that Frances Newman’s heroine ever imagined. Perhaps she had never heard of the Freudian *libido*, but in dealing with the newly-liberated blacks she learned plenty about rape, incest, and sadism. In the course of time, though, her hair grew white and her once erect spine bowed under the weight of years. She mellowed and refined into an appearance of great daintiness and fragility, and it took much more than casual observation to detect the truth that under her frail exterior she was all whipcord and steel. The dear old ladies in lace caps became the ideal of Southern womanhood, and a great many women who had not been tempered in the furnace heats of Reconstruction assumed the rôle of Southern ladies.

Unfortunately, though, the appearance was nothing and the temper was everything. A generation of “Southern ladies” grew up that were not Damascus blades, and not even good, honest Barlow knives, but brummagem goods unable to withstand any real test. Nevertheless, so strong was the tradition, they were accepted for a long time as the real thing, in the South. It is this sort of “Southern lady” that Ellen Glasgow has dissected and Frances Newman has mangled. Perhaps the ablest inquiry ever conducted into her genesis, etiology, and pathology is in a book to which too lit-

tle attention has been paid in the South, Sara Haardt's "The Making of a Lady." Haardt, however, has ignored the first rule of dramatization, which is to magnify everything by ten diameters; her book, as a result, is too calm, dispassionate, and accurate in its reporting to command much attention, and her too-quiet voice has been largely ignored.

Newman, however, was too loud to be ignored. Even if the South had been able to pass her by with a sniff, it would have done no good; for the benighted Yankees instantly and gleefully recognized her lovely nymphomaniac as, feature for feature, the very "Southern lady" to whom they had been introduced during the last twenty years. The benighted Yankees had rarely encountered the real thing, for the Southern lady who was really great and wonderful, and who established the title as a thing to command the reverence and admiration of every manful Southern man, was usually too poor and too busy to travel until she grew too old to travel. Consequently, the female Southerners who have invaded the North carrying the name of Southern ladies have too frequently been cheap little tarts really much below the level of Katharine Faraday, who was dignified to a certain extent by her intellectual curiosity. This is the sort of thing we find it difficult to acknowledge. It is much easier and more satisfactory to attribute the slight esteem in which the rest of the country holds the "Southern lady" to prejudice. It is much easier to attribute all unfavorable opinion to prejudice. But it is also false and idiotic.

It is certainly not my purpose to try to start a cult of Newman worshippers. The truth is, I never liked the woman's work; its finish is too hard and glossy. But she was important if only as a reminder to the world that the South still produces not "ladies" only, but also women equipped with intelligence, energy, courage, and resolution. She deserves better things of her native section than the denunciations that the scandal-mongers of Atlanta have heaped upon her.

Julia Peterkin has fared somewhat better. After all, con-

trary to popular opinion in some sections, literate Southerners do read the newspapers, and practically everybody below the Potomac knows that Julia Peterkin once won the Pulitzer Prize. So, while some of us may cherish the suspicion that Mrs. Peterkin's books are not as ladylike as they might be, still we regard her as important enough to be introduced to Governors. There is a delicious story of how a flustered secretary, ignoring her protests, once dragged her up to an Excellency and presented her as "the author of that magnificent book 'Porgy'." And when the novelist, aghast, murmured that unfortunately the honor was not hers, but belonged to Mr. DuBose Heyward, the unabashed secretary straightened it out with the explanation, "Well, Mrs. Peterkin has written—ah—well, Mrs. Peterkin has written *something!*"

I have always cherished a suspicion that this lad was remarkably right. Mrs. Peterkin has not only written something, but it may be argued plausibly that it is something that ought not to be mentioned to Governors of Southern States. For Governing is a practical business. Governors should be men of action. And what, pray, can a Governor do about "Scarlet Sister Mary"? Or "Black April"? Or "Green Thursday"? There is something to be said for the theory that the minds of public officials, like those of young children, should be protected from too early and too intimate acquaintance with the Facts of Life. For when a Governor has heard what Julia Peterkin has to say of the pain and frailty, the poignant humanity of black people struggling in the clutch of circumstance, he is likely to develop an enfeebling skepticism of the hangman's noose and the penitentiary bars as effective social agencies. Yet without liberal use of these agencies it is probable that the business of governing the bi-racial South would be even worse conducted than it is now.

Peterkin, DuBose Heyward, and Paul Green exemplify the method of the new school of Southern writers in dealing

with the Negro. Stribling, Faulkner, Wolfe, and Caldwell concern themselves with the black man only incidentally; and with Howard W. Odum, writing about the Negro is an avocation.

The case of DuBose Heyward is peculiarly interesting because his work, like that of Robert Louis Stevenson, represents a triumph of acute observation and—if I dare employ an outmoded phrase in the presence of the new psychology—intuitive insight. Mrs. Peterkin has managed Negro servants all her life, and has observed field-hands in the country. Green has worked, and worked with, Negro farmers from his youth up. Odum, too, knows the farm and country Negroes. But Heyward is not only an aristocrat, but a city man at that. His acquaintance with the Negro has been confined almost entirely to observation of city types, and if there is one thing about the blacks on which all Southerners are agreed, it is that the town Negro is psychologically far more complicated and difficult to comprehend than the unspoiled primitive of the fields.

Nevertheless, the perfection of detail in "Porgy" has rarely, if ever, been excelled by any white man writing about Negroes; and at the same time this intense realism has been successfully combined with a poetic treatment that makes an essentially squalid and blood-curdling melodrama emerge as a glittering and exquisite romance. The sea-change that Stevenson worked upon cut-throats, the American has worked on the dwellers in Negro slums. Obviously Heyward's strength and his weakness alike are attributable to the fact that he is a poet, and a good one. The magic that informs "Carolina Chansons" gleams in all his books, making "Porgy" great, ruining "Angel," popularizing "Mamba's Daughters," and completely depopularizing "Peter Ashley." Doubtless the relative failure of "Ashley" is due to the fact that it was mistaken for a novel because it looks like one; whereas it is in reality DuBose Heyward's finest poem, written without rhyme or meter because it needs neither.

There is no finer English style in the South than Heyward's; there is no keener eye, no more discerning mind than his; there is no more honest and truthful writer. And yet I hesitate to set him up as the most important man who has emerged in the region within the last ten years. For he is not only a poet, but a lyricist. He is William Morris' necromancer, who can conjure up outside every window a vision of delight,

While still, unheard, but in its wonted way,
Piped the drear wind of that December day.

He can evoke Paradise, but he cannot, or he will not, raise hell; and that is both his strength and his weakness.

Paul Green can, but he always does it *à la manière de* somebody or other. The result is that while he is a triple-threat man, he has remained more or less a threat. He is a good dramatist, but Heyward is better. He is a good scenario writer, but Stallings is better. He is a good storyteller, but several other Southerners are more popular, and Wolfe, at least, is more powerful. Yet there isn't a more sincere, conscientious, and courageous artist in the South. Green has been deprecated as being too derivative. I don't believe it. His ideas are not library ideas, smelling of the lamp. He derives from the soil of North Carolina, and nowhere else. Yet the fact remains that he has not struck the imagination of the public as several essentially lighter men have done. To the observer he seems to be a hobbled talent, obviously capable of far greater things than it has actually achieved. What is the impediment? Certainly not lack of honesty, or courage, or energy; or the presence of emotional anemia. Probably it is based on too much respect for his betters. He has read too much, and understood too well the excellence of what he read. He knows exactly how Sophocles did it, and he is incapable of imagining that there are any circumstances under which Paul Green could do it better than Sophocles. But, as a matter of fact, there are. Occasionally Green lights on a theme for which there are no

precedents, so he is compelled to use his own judgment. For example, he published in Harper's a few months ago a sketch called "Fine Wagon"—relating how a Negro teamster gloried in his recently-acquired wagon, which broke down at the first test. It was extremely slight, but it told more about the real Negro problem than can be found in fifteen pounds of sociological investigations of race relations. As for its artistic quality, well, in half a dozen pages it presented man contending with destiny—pride prostrated by its own absurdity, love helpless to aid the beloved, aspiration defeated by the aspirant's own faults, hope doomed from the start. It was so perfectly the tragedy of human existence that for three months I have been striving earnestly to forget the cursed thing, and finding it as irrepressible as Banquo's ghost. But it owes nothing to Sophocles. It is art in North Carolina, not in Athens.

There is no more enigmatic figure among Southern writers than Howard W. Odum. He is a sociologist by trade and a novelist only on the side, so to speak. On my desk as I write is a pamphlet he recently issued on regional planning for some learned society in California. The second sentence in it reads:

To the extent that propositions submitted may constitute evidence in support of these premises they may be considered as hypotheses basic to the conclusions which follow.

Well, now, I ask you—could Herbert Hoover beat it? Yet the man knows English. Not only does he speak it fluently, but he writes it with extraordinary effectiveness. You may think I lie, but this is the very man who, in "Rainbow Round My Shoulder," caught the essence of a Negro vagrant's speech, caught and fixed on the printed page one of the most elusive cadences known, caught and preserved its *cæsuras*, its syncopations, its retarded beats, all its queer, shuffling, light-hearted rhythm. As an artistic *tour de force* it is amazing; but not more amazing than the English that

Howard Odum turns out when he lapses into the sociologist again. However, it is as creative critic more than as creative artist that Odum has figured importantly in the revival of letters in the South. He has to an extraordinary degree the faculty of stimulating others to work. In the brave days before 1932, when a panic-stricken Legislature wrecked the public school system of North Carolina and murdered the State University outright at the behest of a combination of farmers and industrialists tired of paying taxes, Odum was one of the galaxy of scholars who made the village of Chapel Hill the intellectual capital of the Confederacy. Since that time more than two-score of his colleagues have fled the devastated region for their livings, if not their lives, but Odum hangs on. It is encouraging to believe that his work is not yet done—that he may still write something other than sociological treatises, and still spur others on to write well.

Yet, the people thus far considered all together have not done as much to establish in the North and West a certain reputation for Southern writing as has been accomplished by four men, to wit, T. S. Stribling, Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, and Erskine Caldwell. These are the real equerries of Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones, these are the merchants of death, hell, and the grave, these are the horror-mongers-in-chief. These are they who drive the conservative Confederates into apoplexy.

And these lads, if you must have it, have very nearly been too much for me. If I have seemed to speak disparagingly of Southerners who dislike this quartet, candor compels the admission that I am not much better. I make no boasts of my physical prowess in other respects, but I have always cherished the belief that I have a right strong stomach; yet perusal of the works of these four has shown me very definitely that there are limits beyond which I dare not go.

Yet, despite the queasiness which they have caused a great many of us, is it not clear to every Southerner who has paused to give the matter real consideration that each of

these has made a contribution to the advancement of civilization in the South? Take Mr. Stribling, for example. Year before last he won the Pulitzer Prize with a novel warranted to make any conservative Confederate gag; more than that, it was the second member of a trilogy, of which the first was almost as appalling and the third was worse; and more than that, as early as 1926 he had stripped the hides off our much-coddled mountaineers in "Teeftallow." A rough and obnoxious fellow this, beyond a doubt; and yet "The Forge," "The Store," and "Unfinished Cathedral" were the very antidote needed for too much Thomas Nelson Page. The original Page, I still think, was an artist of high attainments; but his excellencies had been copied to a nauseous excess.

It is an undeniable fact that in forty-odd years nearly all spent in the South I have rarely seen anybody as vile as everybody is in Mr. Stribling's books; but then I have rarely seen anybody as noble as everybody is in Mr. Page's books. The fact is that there is no realism in either; they are both great romanticists, only Mr. Page took his out in loving and Mr. Stribling his in hating. Nevertheless, since we had had Page, Stribling was an absolute necessity if we were to regain something like balance. And to my mind, every Southerner who has read the earlier novelist is under an obligation to read the later one. In "Unfinished Cathedral" he has performed the immensely important service of reminding us that if we dig around the foundations of every great fortune, in the South as elsewhere, we are pretty sure to release stench that are beyond all credibility. Money in great piles is acquiring far too much sanctity in the South; if Stribling helps release us from the evil spell of millions, is he not a laborer worth his hire? With all the noisome odors he has released, he is a sign of health; for we have no right to shut our eyes when Colonel Miltiades Vaiden comes by simply because Colonel Carter of Cartersville is handsomer.

Thomas Wolfe fired one broadside and then fell silent—at least until this spring: a new book by him is announced as this

is written. But he need do no more. "Look Homeward, Angel" is enough to justify half a dozen lives. I admit that the book is full of faults and flaws; but remember, my lords and gentlemen, so is "Don Quixote," so is "David Copperfield," so is "Les Misérables"; and the defects of Wolfe's huge tome are of the same order, that is to say, the defects of overabundant vitality, of too tremendous an internal pressure, of too mighty a struggle for expression. It is full of confusion, but it arises from the swirl of too many ideas all trying to reach expression at once, not from futile groping for any idea at all. It carries too great a spate of words, but that is due to its headlong rush, not to idling and dilly-dallying along the way. It is roaring and cacophonous, not dulcet, but is it reasonable to expect Polyphemus in his agony to flute sweetly?

Here, at any rate, is size. Wolfe's book may deserve any or all of a dozen derogatory adjectives, but no one can call it petty. And the South has needed size. She has produced many graceful men—Page and Cable come to mind at once—and occasionally she brings forth such a sinewy fellow as Cabell; hearty bucks on the order of Cobb and O. Henry she has known fairly frequently; but the sober, unflattering truth is that her average product is of lesser stature than these—not a man, but a mannikin. I have never seen Mr. Wolfe in the flesh; for aught I know to the contrary, he may stand five feet two in his socks and wear a thirteen collar; but as an artist he is shod with number twelve brogans and swings John Henry's sledge-hammer.

His protest is not against the machinations of what General Hugh Johnson would call "slight men." The devilment of bankers and industrialists and politicians and the reverend clergy does not worry, or even interest, him. He roars against the immortal gods. He girds at Fate, he grapples and goes to the mat with Destiny. They talk about the baneful effect of his long study of Greek on his style, but the fact is he has brought Greek tragedy into the lives of

the hill people of North Carolina. And in so doing he has touched them with a new dignity, a larger significance. He has frightened them, enraged them, depressed them, grieved them; but he has also established a link between them and the mighty past; and who can deny that this Greek has come bearing a gift that may be terrible, but is royal, too?

Some say that William Faulkner, when he wrote his two most celebrated books, was indulging in the exercise known among purists as kidding. Certainly there is no discoverable plan or purpose in "As I Lay Dying" or in "Sanctuary." And Mr. Faulkner has come to an untimely end, apparently having gone respectable in the very flower of his life. But if his motive remains obscure, his accomplishment is as plain as a pikestaff. It may be true that, having written two or three pretty good books which created not even a ripple of interest, he determined to jar the natives off their perch at any cost, simply as revenge on their complacency. At any rate, he did it. I am one who yawned over "Dracula" and was never able to finish it; I have read books about the interesting rites of the South Sea cannibals, and eaten hog jowls and cabbage right heartily immediately thereafter; I have even dipped into "Untrodden Paths of Anthropology" with only a few mild shudders. But "Sanctuary" put me under the weather for thirty-six hours. Never a conservative Confederate of the lot, never a simpering old woman of either sex, was any more profoundly shocked.

But the shock has worn off, while a profound admiration of the cleverness of this artist in horror remains. There is a page in "Sanctuary" which mentions no murder, or rape, or lynching, or sexual degeneracy, or blood, or ordure, but which sticks in my mind as the most devilishly brilliant passage in the book. It is nothing more than a description of a group of college students on a train; but the casual, almost inadvertent, way in which the author reveals the smallness of their souls, the pettiness of their minds, the damnable worthlessness of the whole lot, makes tremendous writing.

However, even in its less subtle horrors, "Sanctuary" has done well for the South in revealing the fact that there are rotting spots in our civilization that are capable of producing things so revolting that the mind recoils from their contemplation. Does that discovery do us any good? Well, it depends on whether we feel strongly enough about it to do something. The novelist has done his part.

Mr. Erskine Caldwell, evidently, is a much more solemn fellow than Mr. Faulkner. His horrors are by no means so incomprehensible, and his reaction to them is very purposeful. But the monstrosities he dredges up from Southern social depths are even more frightful, for they lack the aura of unreality that hangs about the Faulkner books. One sees here the direct and appalling results of a slipshod social and economic system, the final effect of that rugged individualism which some of us have been foolish enough to praise. Old Jeeter Lester, of "Tobacco Road," is no such emanation from the Pit as Popeye, but he is a much more sharp reproach to American civilization; while Ty-Ty, of "God's Little Acre," is the ruin of a man indeed.

It is true that Mr. Caldwell tills a field that is both narrow and barren. One soul may be as precious as another in the sight of God, but in the sight of history what happens to the half-wits has not often had an appreciable effect on the fate of nations. The destiny of the South, as far as the measurable future is concerned, is being worked out in the Stribling, rather than in the Caldwell, stratum of society. As far as social effectiveness is concerned, Mr. Caldwell is for the most part wasting a fine talent; but his artistic effectiveness is great enough to create beauty in the most unlikely places—to spread an iridescent shimmer over the slime.

These, it seems to me, are the people who have played the leading rôles in the pageant of Southern letters. Of course they are not the only Southerners who are doing good work; all the way from Lizette Woodworth Reese, in Maryland, to those excellent yarn-spinners, Maristan Chapman, in their

new home in Florida, one finds able people scattered about. But they are not under the big top. The performance that all the rest of the world regards as the main show in the South lists on its program Popeye and Ty-Ty, Colonel Miltiades Vaiden and Oliver Gant, Porgy, Scarlet Sister Mary, Black Ulysses, Abraham McRae, and Katharine Faraday. "The pulse of the tom-toms in its veins, the scents of the jungle in its nostrils . . . colorful beyond belief . . . wearing smears of paint like a witch-doctor . . . outlandish but . . . not monotonous, . . . gorgeously barbaric, but . . . not monotonous." That was written in 1924, but I think I'll let it stand—yes, I'll let it stand.

Furthermore, having provided myself with a gas-mask in case of another "Sanctuary" or "God's Little Acre," I find myself able to swell with patriotic pride as the show proceeds. Do you demur, on the ground that it is a horrible South these novelists are parading before us? Then you are looking at it with blind eyes. You are seeing only the lame, the halt, and the blind; the morons, the perverts, the idiots, the murders, the satyriasis and nymphomania, the lust and lues. You are overlooking the horror and pity these things have aroused in some of the best minds of the South. You are overlooking the burning indignation that such things should be in the land we love, and the fierce determination that the South shall see at any cost, shall see although her soul is sickened, shall see in spite of a thick crust of prejudice, hypocrisy, laziness, arrogance, and fear; shall stand, like Faust, and for her own soul's salvation, gaze into perdition. And you are overlooking the towering compliment to the South implicit in these people's belief that if she sees, she will act.

The horrible South was the South that was morally, spiritually, and intellectually dead. The South that fatuously regarded every form of art, literature included, as a pretty toy, but in no sense one of the driving forces of civilization—that was the horrible South. The ghastly, cadaverous South

that for forty years after the Civil War groped in the twilight region between civilization and barbarism was a figure of horror; and yet more horrible was the South that began to grow fat at the turn of the century, and that through prosperous years grew fatter and fatter, especially in the head, until it seemed likely that both her brain and her heart were doomed to drown in her own grease. The South whose young women were silent except for giggles, and whose young men were silent except for brays—that was a horrible South.

But a South full of bitter, muscular men with swords—that may be alarming, but it isn't horrible. A young man who raves and curses with the voice of Stentor and the venom of Jeremiah, may be described by any number of adjectives, but no rational man will intimate that he is dead. If a good deal of the South's recent literature stinks—and in my opinion it does—it is with the odors of the barnyard, not those of the charnel-house. The pretty literature of thirty years ago had a different smell; it reeked of tuberose, funeral flowers. An undertaker's parlor, banked with floral designs, smells sweeter than a compost-heap; but death is in the midst of one, and the promise of a golden harvest in the other.

If I believed that the horror-mongers were the South's last word, I might be as deeply chagrined as anyone. But they are not. On the contrary, they are almost the first, but they will be far from the last Southerners to grapple courageously and vigorously with the problems of the modern South. And the grappling is the thing of importance, not the incidental noise. Dixie, far from standing aghast, ought to hail this uproar with the triumphant shout of the Father broadcasting the return of his Prodigal Son; for her youth "was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found."